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TAGS: [CM](#) [EAIR](#) [ECON](#) [EFIN](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [SENV](#)

SUBJECT: CAMEROON'S PRIME MINISTER ON ECONOMY AND GOVERNANCE

Classified By: Pol/Econ Chief Scott Ticknor for reasons 1.4 (d) and (e)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a December 15 meeting with Ambassador, Prime Minister Philemon Yang said the Cameroonian economy was improving, with renewed focus on the energy and agriculture sectors. He appreciated recent productive meetings with Boeing and Lufthansa Consulting to revive the national airline CAMAIRCO. He expressed interest in the MCC and asset recovery assistance. President Biya was waiting to issue a decree on the Electoral Commission (ELECAM) until the institution was more established; progress was likely on creating a Senate in 2010. Yang is beginning to disappoint some observers as unable to energize the bureaucracy and less accessible than his predecessor. End summary.

#### Climate Change Summit

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¶2. (SBU) Yang confirmed that President Biya would attend the Copenhagen climate change summit. Cameroon has a lot at stake, given the importance of the Congo Basin as a forest resource, he said. "We need to begin to talk about using our forests productively," he added.

#### Economy Getting Healthier

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¶3. (SBU) Yang conceded that the 2009 budget was "ambitious" but believed the economy was getting healthier, even with a decline in oil revenues. Referring to President Biya's June directive that the economy be jump-started in six months, Yang praised "some improvement," but also noted "some seeds will take time." He highlighted the strength of the informal sector and regional trade, pointing out that the government has consistently paid its salaries and is making infrastructure investments. The two key sectors are energy and agriculture, he said, pointing to efforts to boost the energy sector, including progress on Lom Pangar dam, the Chinese-backed Memve'ele dam, and a Kribi gas-fired plant ("the government and AES are on the same wavelength," he said - we will report more on the energy sector septel). The government had also disbursed funds to strengthen agriculture and animal husbandry, Yang added.

#### CAMAIRCO

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¶4. (SBU) Yang remains the Chairman of the Board of Cameroon's airline CAMAIRCO, which he described as an "instrument of national unity." He noted that he had a "very positive" meeting with visiting Boeing representatives the previous week and that President Biya and former Camair staff very much liked Boeing aircraft. Yang has also been working closely with Lufthansa Consulting, which is doing a study to lay the groundwork for CAMAIRCO planning. He hoped CAMAIRCO would eventually fly to Europe, East and West Africa, and domestically, but understood that it would take time to develop these plans and the resulting aircraft requirements.

15. (C) The Ambassador gave Yang a copy of Cameroon's Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) 2009 scorecard, which he was eager to review in more detail in a separate meeting. He believed MCC goals were generally beneficial for Cameroon. He appreciated the "no nonsense" frank criticism which World Bank Vice President for Africa Obiageli Ezekwesili had given President Biya during a visit to Yaounde earlier in the week. Note: World Bank Resrep told Ambassador that Ezekwesili had lectured Biya on his lack of leadership, in light of Cameroon's poor governance and development shortcomings, and had criticized the lack of coordination in his government. The World Bank VP reportedly urged fundamental changes in governance. Biya reportedly responded that he wanted to work on this. End note.

16. (C) Ambassador told the PM of our hope to continue cooperation on the recovery of stolen assets. Yang thought this was "marvelous," stressing Cameroon's need for help in this area. The Cameroonian public is pressuring the government to "forget the trials" of arrested corrupt officials and instead "get back the money." When Ambassador noted our continued difficulty in getting approvals for Cameroonian officials to participate in USG training, he responded "the administration is slow," saying we needed to build more advance time into our planning.

ELECAM and the Senate  
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17. (C) President Biya is waiting to sign the Presidential decree needed to transfer the voter register and polling equipment to the Electoral Commission (ELECAM). He wants ELECAM to staff up, register voters and get better organized first, noting that "if there is an election, we need to be ready," according to Yang. (Ambassador interjected "you mean when," to which he responded "yes, when - the next presidential election".) He hoped ELECAM would have a "handsome budget" in 2010, stressing the "tremendous responsibility" of ELECAM members and the care with which the government had created the organization. He praised ELECAM President Samuel Fonkam Azuu and other ELECAM Council members as being "stubbornly independent."

18. (SBU) Yang was "very optimistic" the Senate would be created in 2010. The cost was a big obstacle, especially with other competing demands on funds. In the absence of a Senate or Constitutional Court, both required under the 1996 Constitution but never established, the President of the National Assembly is the constitutional successor to the President and the Supreme Court has the responsibility of announcing election results and ruling on any election disputes, he explained.

Comment  
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19. (C) Yang is less accessible and less responsive than his predecessor, Ephraim Inoni. It took us a month to get this meeting and then Ambassador was sandwiched between his back-to-back meetings with several other Ambassadors. Other contacts have also remarked on the difficulty in meeting Yang and on his lack of energy in shaking up the bureaucracy. He seems to wait for problems to come to him. While gracious and intelligent, he frequently mentions President Biya, who appears to value him more for his loyalty, clean reputation, and Northwest political connections than for his administrative effectiveness.

GARVEY